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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 2008

In Today's Papers

Erdogan Meets Saakashvili and Proposes a 'Caucasus Union'
All news outlets report Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and Prime Minister Erdogan held a joint press conference after they met in Tbilisi Thursday. During the press conference, Saakashvili claimed Russia attacked the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline despite the fact that it was not a military target. Saakashvili also stated Russia aims to weaken Georgia's economic power. Erdogan said Turkey supported the preservation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Liberal Radikal emphasizes that, while Erdogan was voicing support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a press conference it was time to "forget about Georgia's territorial integrity," and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev assured South Ossetia and Abkhazia of Russia's support in their bid for independence. Erdogan said the Turkish Red Crescent (Kizilay) was the first humanitarian relief organization to reach out to Georgia, adding another convoy carrying 160 tons of food aid would reach the region on Thursday. Erdogan also pledged support for rebuilding the infrastructure of the city of Gori.

After returning home yesterday, Erdogan held a news conference in the Aegean coastal town of Bodrum where he was vacationing with his family before the crisis broke out in the Caucasus. Erdogan said he shared his proposal for the formation of a "Caucasus Platform" with the Georgian President and added that Moscow, too, was warm to the proposal. He noted Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov would meet next week and launch the "Caucasus Platform" process. He added that Turkey also wants Azerbaijan and Armenia to participate in this platform. "Turkey favors Georgia's independence, sovereignty and its territorial integrity as defined by international law and the resolutions of the UN Security Council," Erdogan told reporters.

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak carries the headline, "Peace Brought to the Caucasus," as, "there is hope for peace in the Caucasus after Moscow and Tbilisi give support to Erdogan for a Caucasus Union." Mainstream Sabah carries the headline, "From Now On, Turkey Is a Major Player," as Turkish leadership has pursued, "active diplomacy

in the region" when "Erdogan goes to the area under fire." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Erdogan gives support to Georgia's territorial integrity, while Moscow calls the notion a "dead topic" and Russian military actions continue." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet accuses Russia of playing the "separatist card."

Editorial Opinion on Turkey's Efforts in the Caucasus

Ferai Tinc wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (8/15): "Some circles argue that Russia gained more influence following its war with Georgia. The Russian army displayed a show of force in Georgia that was important after Russia showed such weakness in Chechnya. Yet at the same time Russia has lost significant ground as a global partner to the United States and Europe. Thanks to Georgia, the US has now a powerful trump card against Russia. Ahmadinejad is racing against time as he awaits the result of American elections. Meanwhile those voices that support a strike against Iran in the US and in Israel are getting stronger. Russia used to play a major role that balanced international opinion against Iran, but after the war in Georgia, Russia has lost a great deal of influence."

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah (8/15): "While PM Erdogan in Tbilisi was expressing support for Georgia's territorial integrity, Russian FM Lavrov in Moscow stated that 'the territorial integrity of Georgia is out of question after the recent developments.' For the time being, Russia is planning not to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia officially. In time, there will be a de facto recognition. Russian media interpret this development as these two countries will be just like the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I believe that this development in the Caucasus will have an impact

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on the Cyprus issue: The peace negotiations in Cyprus start next month and the Greek Cypriot side will be conciliatory since the war in South Ossetia started a new era of fighting for the un-recognized states in the world."

Sami Kohen questioned in mainstream Milliyet (8/15): "PM Erdogan suggested a 'Caucasus Stability and Cooperation platform' in Russia and Georgia in order to find a solution to the recent problems in Caucasus. He also noted that this is just a thought and should be worked on before turning it into a project."

Okay Gonensin wrote in mainstream Vatan (8/15): "Turkey is in a region where vast historical conflicts have taken place. It is not easy to manage to stay out of the fire without taking sides. The West was disturbed by the Ahmadinejad visit, while serious problems continue in Georgia. The PM loves to act as a mediator, but acting as a mediator in such a chaotic climate has some consequences. If the AKP government starts acting outside of the traditional Turkish policy line, it may cause serious results to Turkey."

Mumtazer Turkone in Islamist-leaning Zaman (8/15): "Russia defends the principle of self-determination in the Caucasus; however, Russia also has to remember the fact that this principle itself led to the end of the Russian empire. The competition between Turkey and Russia is growing again. It's obvious that in the new era, this competition will not be as bloody as it was in the past. Turkish foreign policy, however, will be shaped according to the Russian factor. We must look at the Caucasus carefully."

Mustafa Balbay in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet (8/15): "President Bush talked about sending an American fleet to the Black Sea. A U.S. fleet, of course, will enter the Black Sea through the Straits, and not the Urals. The U.S. wants to dominate the Black Sea, and to that end, pushes Ankara to not apply the Montreux Treaty provisions to the United States. The status of the Straits will be a hot topic in the days ahead. Turkey's interests lie in establishing a balance in the region, not in taking sides. It is not possible to read the 21st century correctly with the Cold War era compasses."

Iranian President Ahmadinejad Comes to Turkey

All papers: In the first day of his working visit to Turkey, Iranian President Ahmadinejad met with President Gul and the two leaders held a joint press conference following the meeting. President Gul said "we support Iran's right to use nuclear energy

for civilian purposes but, Iran should cooperate with the western world and resolve the issue through diplomatic ways." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that three memoranda of understanding were signed for cooperation between the national libraries, cooperation in transport and environmental issues. Mainstream Hurriyet notes that the energy agreement, which the US was against, was not signed. But the two countries made a very extensive agreement in security issues. Ahmadinejad will meet with PM Erdogan today and leave the country tonight.

Editorial Opinion on Ahmadinejad's Turkey Visit

Turker Alkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal (8/15): "We all witnessed the tragedy even a small-scale war in Georgia can cause. If Iran is attacked by the US and/or Israel, the aftermath will be like a colossal earthquake. The solution to the problem requires a change in Ahmadinejad's two major policy lines. He has to give up his threats to wipe out Israel and his ambition to produce an atomic bomb. Given the speeches he makes, he seems to live in a different reality. He has to wake up and be realistic before he painfully learns the difference between rhetoric and reality."

Ibrahim Karagul wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak (8/15): "There are some overlooked facts about the aftermath of the war in Georgia. Moscow does not recognize Georgia's territorial integrity any more. East-West energy routes are no longer safe without [the involvement

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of] Russia and Iran. Turkey's leaders realize the importance of these consequences and PM Erdogan rushed to Russia to propose a Caucasus union. Meanwhile the visit of Ahmadinejad angered Turkey's allies. Israel gave a protest note to Ankara a week ago. In fact Turkey wants to make the Black Sea a region for peace and economic stability. What could be wrong about an Iran-Turkey rapprochement in this respect? Apparently Turkey is not wanted as a regional power."

New Detentions in Ergenekon Case

Cumhuriyet, Turkiye, Vatan, Milliyet, Hurriyet and others: Retired Colonel Arif Dogan and two others were detained in Ankara and Istanbul under the Ergenekon probe. Hurriyet says police seized a truckload of documents believed to have been from the archives of the Gendarmerie intelligence Unit (JITEM), 1000 bullets, 280 grenades, and 2 Kalashnikov rifles from Dogan's estate agent office in Istanbul.

Meanwhile, papers report that an arrest warrant was issued for retired General Levent Ersoz and former AKP deputy Turan Comez.

Paper: Armenia's 'Visa Gesture' for Turks

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet and the Islamist-oriented Zaman report the Armenian government decided Thursday to establish a visa-free regime for Turkish soccer fans' entry into Armenia from September 1-6 for the September 6 World Soccer Cup qualifier game between the teams of the two countries. Last month, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul to Yerevan to watch the game together. Ankara has so far not responded to the invitation.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- On Thursday, at least 40 members of the pro-Kurdish DTP were taken into custody in Adana under suspicions they were planning attacks before August 15, the anniversary of the date when the PKK staged its first armed attack in 1984.

- Workers in Istanbul's Tuzla shipyards return to work after the death of three colleagues in a deadly lifeboat test earlier this week.

- The body of the extreme left DHKP-C leader Dursun Karatas was brought to Istanbul for burial. Aslan Tayfun Ozkok, a potential DHKP-C leader to replace Karatas, was captured in south Cyprus while

trying to board a plane to the Netherlands to join Karatas' funeral.

International News

- Jerome Corsi attacks Senator Barack Obama in a book saying that Obama has tried to cover up "extensive connections to Islam."
- The white majority in the U.S. will be outnumbered by Americans of other races by 2042, eight years sooner than previously projected by the Census Bureau.
- British Airways PLC, American Airlines and Spain's Iberia SA say they have signed a joint business agreement on flights between North America and Europe.

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